

AUNT ESTELLE'S VALENTINE

By F. P. FITZER

AUNT ESTELLE CROSBY entered the village store for her mail. On the way out she paused to admire a number of fancy and comic valentines in the long glass show-case. She never had seen anything of this kind before at Lanesville, and it aroused her curiosity. Just then she remembered how shamefully Susan Stryker had treated her when she married Dave Crosby, after Susan had courted him—or rather Dave had courted her—and an idea entered her spiteful little brain.

"Wot's the kind tew send your enemies?" she asked.

"Why," said Lane, "these here cheap, colored, comical, ugly ones."

"Mr. Lane," said Estelle softly, "jest pick out the ugliest, homeliest, most comical and meanest one you've got in the whole bunch and I'll buy it."

"Is it for a man or woman?" asked the storekeeper smilingly.

"For neither," replied Estelle; "it's for a gossipin' shrew."

In accordance with her wishes, Lane selected a crude and hideous picture with appropriate rhyme below it, and as Mrs. Crosby walked out of the store hurriedly the proprietor's deep-set eyes twinkled merrily.

On the following morning Mrs. Crosby's missive was received by Susan, and when that woman tore open the envelop and beheld what it contained she was as mad as a Lanesville hornet. She grumbled something, and said she'd get even with the woman who sent it. But who had sent it? That was the perplexing question. Strangely, she never gave Estelle Crosby a thought. "Um, I know," she almost shouted, "it was that gusher, Pinner, Joan Pinner! Getting even on me for the time I told her she sang like an ancient church organ with bronchitis. I know what I'll do: I'll mail it back to her." And she lost no time in returning it to Joan Pinner, whom she thought had sent it to her.

When Mrs. Pinner received it, she carried on with as much ill-temper as Mrs. Stryker exhibited, and the first thing she said was: "Drat her! This is some of Myra Barter's work, as sure as I've got a mortgage on my farm, but back it'll go quicker'n it came!"

And the ugly comic valentine went immediately on its new journey to Myra Barter. When it reached that lanky widow's hands, she lost no time in putting it into another envelop and addressing it to Estelle Crosby. "She's the calico-dressed dummy that sent it. I'm positive she did. Thinks it's revenge for the time I doused her son in the duck pond for shearin' one o' my sheep; but it's goin' back tew her, an' Uncle Samuel's post is goin' tew deliver it!"

And again the homely picture went on its way.

Now, when Estelle once more received the valentine, she felt sure that Susan Stryker had returned it, for it was to her that she had sent it originally. So, throwing it to one side, she put on her winter wraps and hurried down to the village post office, where she was sure to meet Mrs. Stryker and let her know that the Crosbys stood for no nonsense.

Mrs. Crosby hardly had located the Stryker woman when in walked Joan Pinner and Myra Barter. It appeared that all were there for the same purpose, each waiting for the other to begin the conversation.

"Cold weather," began Mrs. Stryker, pretending to examine some cambric on the counter.

"It ought to freeze some wimmen folks," grumbled "Aunt" Estelle, kicking the snow from her shoes.

"Guess there's lots o' surprises down tew the big cities tew-day," interrupted the "Honorable" Sydney Armstrong just then. He was sitting beside the stove with his feet propped up on the rim and

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smoking peaceably. After a short silence he continued: "Got what I thought was a letter from my city folks to-day, and by gum! all it contained was a valentine. Anybody else been getting valentines, I wonder?"

"Um!" grunted the four women in unison, each wondering what caused the others to issue such muffled ejaculations.

After another quiet spell, Estelle said in an angry tone of voice: "I got one o' those valentines myself."

"So did I!" exclaimed the other three in the same breath.

"But mine was an ugly one, with a red nose, shaggy purple hair, an' dressed up enough to make a crow get convulsions!" and after emitting this remark "Aunt" Estelle braced herself for a dramatic climax. But her countenance changed somewhat when the others exclaimed: "So was mine!"

"But it happens that I know the mean, scrawny, gossip female that sent mine," went on Mrs. Crosby, shaking her head.

"So do I!" shouted the other three once more.

Things were getting interesting.

"What does this mean?" continue! Estelle, looking rather surprised. "I'm pretty sure you sent mine, Susan Stryker."

"What?" almost screamed Susan. "I never sent you a valentine, Aunt Estelle; but the one I got cum from Joan Pinner."

This accusation aroused Mrs. Pinner, and pointing her long finger at Myra Barter, she shouted: "You wrong me, Sue Stryker; but there stands the woman that sent mine, jest as sure as you can't skim milk on both sides!"

This riled Myra Barter, and walking over to where "Aunt" Estelle was standing, she gasped: "It's you that sent mine, Mrs. Crosby, an' I shouldn't be surprised if you sent 'em all. I cum down here to give you a piece o' my mind f'r that low trick an'—"

"But that's what I come down to see Sue Stryker about," interrupted "Aunt" Estelle.

"An' I come to rake Joan Pinner over the coals for the same thing," chimed Susan.

"An' I tew have an understandin' with Myra Barter," said Joan.

"Ladies," interposed the "Honorable" Sydney just then, who had been chuckling to himself during the entire controversy, "this is all like one o' them farce comedies. You're all wrong. There's no doubt those valentines was sent by some city chap who boarded up here last summer, cause the hull four o' them is alike. He done it for a joke, I s'pose."

"That sounds reasonable," said "Aunt" Estelle, "an' I 'pologize tew you, Sue Stryker."

"Pardon my harshness, Joan," said Susan Stryker, "I was just foolin'."

"An' I'm teamin' with Mrs. Stryker," said Myra laughingly.

"An' now that our valentines were all alike," added Mrs. Pinner, "let's trot up tew my house an' have some tea, an' if we catch that city boarder we'll give him victuals that are bound to give him dyspepsia."

And as they went home, all believed that there were four distinct valentines, except "Aunt" Estelle, and she has been busy ever since trying to figure out how a valentine sent by her to Susan Stryker was returned to her by some one else.

THE GLORY OF SOLOMON

WILLIAM M. CHASE, the portrait painter, says that some years ago the Jewish artist Abraham Solomon had exhibited at the Royal Academy in London a striking picture, "Waiting for the Verdict."

Solomon, not being a Royal Academician, entitled to affix the letters R. A. to his name, was forced to see his production "skyped," whereas, as a matter of course, all the paintings sent by the Academicians were hung on the line.

One artist of a witty turn, on first beholding the gorgeous scene depicted on the Jewish artist's canvas, exclaimed:

"There's Solomon in all his glory; but not R. A.'d like one of these."

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